



## Much Ado About Nothing in Westmount Park

### Description

## Repercussion Theatre's latest Shakespeare in the Park offering

By **Byron Toben**

Shakespeare himself didn't like his own play **Much Ado About Nothing**... according to G. Bernard Shaw, who put the disapproval of it into the Bard's own words in Shaw's amusing one act, *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*. Therein, the fictional Shakespeare pleads with Queen Elizabeth I to fund a national theatre where he could concentrate on the meaty stuff like *Hamlet* or *Lear* or *Caesar*, instead of the frothy stuff like *Much Ado About Nothing*, which he says, "as it truly is", being part of audience preferences for commercial pieces. "As You Like It", he adds, "means it is not as I like it". For her reply, see the end of this review.

This annual delight has or will be shown 29 nights in the Montreal area, in venues ranging from Knowlton to Morin Heights to Outremont.



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meantime audience approval over the ages has assured its never-ending life on the stage. A 2012 production at Stratford, Ontario wowed the public with the wondrous Deborah Hay as Beatrice. An innovative version at Toronto's Tarragon in 2015 won plaudits.

Locally in 2017 there have been, so far, three efforts: The new **Snowglobe Theatre** company in January at the Main Line, the **Dawson Theatre** student version in May, and now, in July/August, **Repercussion Theatre's** outdoor in the park's lawn chair special.

This annual delight has or will be shown 29 nights in the Montreal area, in venues ranging from Knowlton to Morin Heights to Outremont. Four of the showings are at our own beautiful Westmount Park, where I enjoyed it on July 22.

Director **Amanda Kellock** hasn't missed a beat, since taking over from the highly regarded Paul Hopkins three years ago. Like Amy Blackmore of the Fringe, she is a child of her present outfit, having attended, then acted in, and now running the show. I enjoyed reviewing her *Twelfth Night* in 2015 and the all-woman *Julius Caesar* in 2016.

In *Much Ado*, soldiers Benedick (Black Theatre Workshop head **Quincy Armorer**) and Claudio (Bishop's grad Dakota **Jamal Wellman**), led by Prince Don Pedro (Repercussion regular **Matthew Kabwe**), return to Messina after a war, visiting its governess, Leonata (cross Canada vet **Susan Glover**).

Leonata has a beautiful daughter Hero (Concordia student **Tiernan Cornford**) and an outspoken niece, Hero's cousin Beatrice (popular local **Holly Gauthier-Frankel**).

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Confirmed bachelor Benedick and proto feminist Beatrice have known each other for years and constantly insult each other. To me, she is a forerunner to the shrew Kate as in *The Taming of*, but not so physically demonstrative. Call her Kate Light. Of course, they secretly love each other.

Claudio falls for Hero and they are pledged to each other but there is trouble afoot in the presence of Don Pedro's bastard brother, Don John (recently retired long-time Geordie director **Dean Patrick Fleming**) who, jealous of Claudio, arranges for scoundrel Borachio (Oman-born **Anurag Choudhury**) to fake the appearance of Hero cheating on Claudio on her wedding eve.

This sinks the wedding but the plot is accidentally discovered by the bumbling constable Dogberry (two-time MECCA best actor **Chip Chuipka**), who massacres words ages before Ms. Malaprop. (He 'comprehends' the villain and thanks his betters for complimenting him on his 'tediousness'.)

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All is resolved, thanks to a ploy by a sympathetic priest (Mr. Choudhury again) and a double wedding and ensemble dance closes the evening.

## Of quotes and music

The show opens with a Women's Lib anthem *You Don't Own Me* and includes a Shakespearean *Hey Nonny Nonny*



. (Helps to have singer actor **Sarah Segal-Lazar** in the cast in the small but important role as Margaret, maid to Hero.)

Not sung, but important for its quote, is Don Pedro's advice to "speak low when you speak love" which became the lyrics for Ogden Nash to Kurt Weil's music in the Broadway hit *One Touch of Venus*. As I am a great fan of both, here it is, as sung by Weil's wife Lotte Lenya:

Oh yes, Queen Elizabeth's response to Shaw's Shakespeare's request to fund a national theatre, "I shall speak of this matter to the Lord Treasurer"... and William "Then I am undone, madame..."

**Much Ado about Nothing** continues **until August 15.**

It revisits Westmount Park on **Tuesday, August 8 and Wednesday, August 9.**

Admission free, donations appreciated. Chair rentals available.

More information at [repercussiontheatre.com](http://repercussiontheatre.com)

*Images: Studio Baron Photo*

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### Date Created

July 2017